

CHAPTER 1

The Study of American Government

REVIEWING THE CHAPTER

CHAPTER FOCUS

The purpose of this chapter is to give you a preview of the major questions to be asked throughout the textbook, as well as to introduce some key terms in the basic vocabulary of American politics. After reading and reviewing the material in this chapter, you should be able to do each of the following:

1. List the two basic questions to be asked about American (or any other) government, and show that they are distinct questions.
2. Explain what is meant by *power* in general human terms and by *political power* in particular, relating the latter to authority, legitimacy, and democracy in the context of American government.
3. Distinguish among the two concepts of democracy mentioned in the chapter, explaining in which of these senses the textbook refers to American government as *democratic*.
4. Differentiate between majoritarian politics and elitist politics, explaining the four major theories of the latter.
5. Explain how political change makes political scientists cautious in stating how politics works or what values dominate it.

STUDY OUTLINE

- I. Introduction
 - A. Government failures
 1. The 9/11 attacks and the passage of homeland security measures
 2. Government response to Hurricanes Katrina and Rita
 - B. Government successes
 1. Reducing poverty among the elderly
 2. Building the interstate highway system
 3. Improving public health
 4. Rebuilding war-torn Europe
- II. Who governs? To what ends?
 - A. Division as a source of “politics”
 - B. Who governs?
 1. What is done to us and for us may depend on who governs
 2. Identifying who governs can be difficult
 3. Competing views cannot all be correct
 - C. To what ends?
 1. Government affects our lives in many ways
 2. This can be seen in larger, longer perspectives
 - D. Who governs does not necessarily determine to what ends

III. What is political power?

- A. Definition: the ability of one person to get another person to act in accordance with the first person's intentions
 - 1. Can be exercised in an obvious or subtle manner
 - 2. Can be found in all human relationships
 - a) Text limits focus to power as exercised by public officials and government
 - b) Recognition that, increasingly, matter once considered "private" are considered "public"
- B. Authority: the right to use power
 - 1. Normally easier to exercise power with a claim of right
 - 2. "Formal authority" when vested in a governmental office
- C. Legitimacy: what makes a law or constitution a source of right
 - 1. Historical struggles over what constitutes legitimate authority
 - 2. 2004 election and gay marriage
 - 3. Our sense of legitimacy is tied to the desire for democratic government
- D. What is democracy?
 - 1. Aristotelian "rule of the many" (direct or participatory democracy)
 - a) Fourth-century B.C. Greek city-state or *polis*
 - b) New England town meeting
 - c) Abandoned as size of towns increased and issues became more complex
 - 2. Acquisition of power by leaders via competitive elections (representative democracy)
 - a) Sometimes disapprovingly referred to as *elitist theory*
 - b) Justifications of representative democracy
 - (1) Direct democracy can be impractical
 - (2) The people are affected by passions and demagogues
- E. Is representative democracy best?
 - 1. Text uses the term democracy to refer to representative democracy
 - a) The Constitution does not contain the word democracy but the phrase "republican form of government"
 - b) Representative democracy requires genuine competition for leadership
 - (1) Individuals and parties must be able to run for office
 - (2) Communication must be free
 - (3) Voters must perceive meaningful choices
 - (4) And other important questions—with multiple answers—remain regarding the number of offices, how many officials (elected and appointed), the financing of campaigns, etc.
 - 2. Virtues of direct democracy can be reclaimed through
 - a) Community control
 - b) Citizen participation
 - 3. Framers did not think the "will of the people" was synonymous with the "common interest" or the "public good"
 - a) They strongly favored representative over direct democracy
 - (1) Government should mediate, not mirror, popular views
 - (2) Assumed citizens would have limited time, information and interest
 - (3) Feared demagogues could easily manipulate fears and prejudices of the masses
 - (4) Preferred a slow moving government
 - (5) Believed representative democracy minimized chance that power would be abused by a popular majority or self-serving officeholders
 - b) But were the Framers right?
 - (1) Are their assumptions about direct democracy applicable today?

- (2) Has representative democracy really protected minority rights and prevented politicians from using public offices for private gain?
- c) Do people have more time, information, energy, interest, expertise, and ability to gather together for collective decisionmaking than they did when the Constitution was adopted?
 - (1) Today, there is unprecedented access to information about everything
 - (a) Five times as much mail as the mid-1990s
 - (b) Ten times as much e-mail as the mid-1990s
 - (2) Impact?
 - (a) Most people (and especially young people) still do not consume much political news
 - (b) Most Americans are not very active in political affairs
 - (c) Few citizens feel close to government or have great confidence in its leaders

IV. How is political power distributed?

- A. Scholars differ in their interpretations of history
- B. Variation in representative democracy
 - 1. Majoritarian politics
 - a) Leaders constrained to follow wishes of the people very closely
 - b) Applies when issues are simple, clear and feasible
 - 2. Non-majoritarian (or elite) politics
 - a) Sometimes the opinion of the people is not known, or even consulted
 - b) The shaping of policy detail probably reflects opinions of those who are more informed and motivated to participate
 - (1) The number of those who are informed and motivated is probably small
 - (2) They are probably not representative of the population as a whole
 - c) Elites: an identifiable group of persons who possess a disproportionate amount of political power
- C. Four theories of elite influence
 - 1. Marxism: government merely a reflection of underlying economic forces
 - 2. C. Wright Mills: power elite composed of corporate leaders, generals, and politicians
 - 3. Max Weber: bureaucracies based on expertise, specialized competence
 - 4. Pluralist view: power is widely dispersed and no single elite has a monopoly on it; polices are the outcome of bargaining, compromise and shifting alliances

V. Is democracy driven by self interest?

- A. Elite theories and cynicism
 - 1. All four theories suggest politics is a self-seeking enterprise
 - 2. Some important qualifications
 - a) Policies may not be wholly self serving
 - b) Democracy may be driven by other motives and desires
 - (1) 9/11 and self-interest
 - (2) Attitudes, allies and the temper of the times are as important
 - c) Some act against long odds and without the certainty of benefit

VI. What explains political change?

- A. Great shifts in character of government reflect change in elite or mass beliefs about what government is supposed to do
 - 1. Growth in federal power and subsequent attempts to cut back
 - 2. Variations in levels of interest in international affairs
- B. Politics about views of the public interest, not just who gets what

VII. The nature of politics

- A. The answer to "Who governs?" is often partial or contingent

- B. Preferences vary, and so does politics
- C. Politics cannot be equated with laws on the books
- D. Sweeping claims are to be avoided
- E. Judgments about institutions and interests should be tempered by how they behave on different issues
- F. The policy process can be an excellent barometer of change in who governs

KEY TERMS MATCH

Match the following terms and descriptions:

1. The ability of one person to cause another person to act in accordance with the first person's intentions	a. Aristotle
2. Power when used to determine who will hold government office and how government will behave	b. authority
3. The right to exercise political power	c. bureaucracy
4. The widely-shared perception that something or someone should be obeyed	d. bureaucratic theory
5. Conferring political power on those selected by the voters in competitive elections	e. citizen participation
6. Term for the Greek city-state	f. city-state
7. An identifiable group of people with a disproportionate share of political power	g. community control
8. A relatively small political unit within which classical democracy was practiced	h. democracy
9. A political system in which the choices of the political leaders are closely constrained by the preferences of the people	i. direct or participatory democracy
10. A philosopher who defined <i>democracy</i> as the "rule of the many"	j. elite (political)
11. A theory that government is merely a reflection of underlying economic forces	k. elitist theory
12. A sociologist who presented the idea of a mostly nongovernmental power elite	l. Hamilton
13. Individual who worried the new government he helped to create would be too democratic	m. legitimacy
14. A sociologist who emphasized the phenomenon of bureaucracy in explaining political developments	n. majoritarian politics
	o. Marxist theory
	p. Mills
	q. New England town meeting
	r. pluralist theory
	s. <i>polis</i>
	t. political power
	u. power
	v. representative democracy
	w. Schumpeter
	x. Weber

15. A political system in which local citizens are empowered to govern themselves directly
16. A political system in which those affected by a governmental program must be permitted to participate in the program's formulation
17. A North American approximation of direct or participatory democracy
18. A theory that no one interest group consistently holds political power
19. Structures of authority organized around expertise and specialization
20. An economist who defined *democracy* as the competitive struggle by political leaders for the people's vote
21. A theory that appointed civil servants make the key governing decisions
22. A term used to describe three different political systems in which the people are said to rule, directly or indirectly
23. A political system in which all or most citizens participate directly by either holding office or making policy
24. A theory that a few top leaders make the key decisions without reference to popular desires

PRACTICING FOR EXAMS

TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS

Read each statement carefully. Mark true statements *T*. If any part of the statement is false, mark it *F*, and write in the space provided a concise explanation of why the statement is false.

1. T F It took the national government many years to implement just a fraction of the bipartisan homeland security policies and programs.

2. T F Politics exists in part because people differ about who should govern and the ends toward which they work.

3. T F Federal income taxes were higher in 1935 than they are today.

4. T F Most people holding political power in the United States today are middle-class, middle-aged, white Protestant males.

5. T F Constitutional amendments giving rights to African Americans and women passed by large majorities.

6. T F It is easy to discern political power at work.

7. T F The text suggests that, increasingly, matters that were once considered “public” become “private,” and beyond the scope of governmental action.

8. T F In the 1950s the federal government would have displayed little or no interest in a university refusing applicants.

9. T F Much of American political history has been a struggle over what constitutes legitimate authority.

10. T F Alexander Hamilton worried that the new government would not be democratic enough.

11. T F Aristotle thought of democracy as the “rule of the many.”

12. T F Everyone in the ancient Greek city-state was eligible to participate in government.

13. T F The New England town meeting approximates the Aristotelian ideal.

14. T F Some writers of the Constitution opposed democracy on the grounds that the people would be unable to make wise decisions.

15. T F Democracy as used in this book refers to the rule of the many.

16. T F The Framers of the Constitution did not think that the “will of the people” was synonymous with the “public good.”

17. T F The Framers suspected even highly educated persons could be manipulated by demagogic leaders who played on their fears and prejudices.

18. T F The Framers hoped to create a representative democracy that would act swiftly and accommodate sweeping changes in policy.

19. T F People today have unprecedented access to information and consume more political news than ever.

20. T F Majoritarian politics probably influence relatively few issues in this country.

21. T F Marxist theory sees society as divided into two classes: capitalists and workers.

22. T F C. Wright Mills included corporate, governmental, and labor officials in his power elite.

23. T F Today, some would add major communications media chiefs to Mills' power elite.

24. T F Weber assigned a significant amount of power to appointed officials in the bureaucracies of modern governments.

25. T F Weber felt that bureaucrats merely implemented public policies that are made by elected officials.

26. T F Pluralists deny the existence of elites.

27. T F The bureaucratic view does the most to reassure one that America has been, and continues to be, a democracy in more than name only.

28. T F A policy can be good or bad independent of the motives of the person who decided it.

29. T F The self-interest of individuals is often an incomplete guide to their actions.

30. T F In the 1920s it was widely assumed that the federal government would play a small role in citizens' lives.

31. T F Who wields power—that is, who made a difference in the outcome and for what reason—is harder to discover than who did what.

32. T F Political change is not always accompanied by changes in public laws.

MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

Circle the letter of the response that best answers the question or completes the statement.

1. Which statement best describes the performance of the government in the aftermath of the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the United States?
 - a. Bipartisan homeland security policies and programs were adopted immediately.
 - b. A fraction of the bipartisan homeland security policies and programs were implemented after many years of debate.
 - c. Recommendations with respect to homeland security were summarily rejected.
 - d. Almost all of the bipartisan homeland security policies and programs were implemented within a year.
 - e. Homeland security programs and policies were considered too controversial for congressional action.
2. Today, on average, Americans pay _____ percent of their income to federal payroll taxes.
 - a. 1
 - b. 4
 - c. 21
 - d. 75
 - e. 83
3. Most national political officeholders are middle-class, middle-aged, white Protestant males. Knowing this, we
 - a. still cannot explain many important policies.
 - b. have identified the power elite.
 - c. can answer the question, "To what ends?"
 - d. can predict little of importance to politics.
 - e. can predict most of the policies that come out of Washington.
4. What do the authors define as "the ability of one person to get another person to act in accordance with the first person's intentions"?
 - a. authority
 - b. power
 - c. influence
 - d. legitimacy
 - e. legislation
5. Which of the following statements concerning power is *correct*?
 - a. Its exercise can sometimes be obvious.
 - b. It can be exercised in subtle ways.
 - c. It involves a person getting another person to act in accordance with the first person's wishes.
 - d. It is found in all human relationships.
 - e. All of the above.

6. Which of the following statements about authority is *correct*?
 - a. It is defined as the right to use power.
 - b. It resides in government, not in the private sector.
 - c. It typically results from the naked use of force.
 - d. It is the opposite of legitimacy.
 - e. All of the above.
7. A survey of 450 history and political science professors resulted in _____ being listed as the most significant achievement of government since 1950.
 - a. devolution
 - b. female suffrage
 - c. social security
 - d. the reduction of the federal deficit
 - e. the rebuilding of Europe
8. Americans seem to agree that the exercise of political power at any level is legitimate only if, in some sense, it is
 - a. systematic.
 - b. democratic.
 - c. bipartisan.
 - d. partisan.
 - e. traditional.
9. In Aristotle's view, democracy would consist of
 - a. the effective representation of the interests of the whole population.
 - b. political representation by all individuals in a society, regardless of race, age, or gender.
 - c. participation by all or most citizens in either holding office or making policy.
 - d. an elite group of policy makers elected by the will of the people.
 - e. a nocturnal council that made decisions without regard to public opinion.
10. Aristotle's notion of democracy is also referred to as
 - a. New York Democracy.
 - b. direct democracy.
 - c. commoner democracy.
 - d. participatory democracy.
 - e. b and d.
11. In the ancient Greek city-state, the right to vote was *not* extended to
 - a. those who did not own property.
 - b. women.
 - c. minors.
 - d. slaves.
 - e. All of the above.
12. Which of the following is a basic tenet of representative democracy?
 - a. Individuals should acquire power through competition for the people's vote.
 - b. It is unreasonable to expect people to choose among competing leadership groups.
 - c. Government officials should represent the true interests of their clients.
 - d. The middle class gains representation at the expense of the poor and minorities.
 - e. Public elections should be held on every issue directly affecting the lives of voters.

13. Sometimes, representative democracy is disapprovingly referred to as the _____ theory of Democracy.
 - a. institutional
 - b. elitist
 - c. popular
 - d. Aristotelian
 - e. Jeffersonian
14. If you fear that people often decide big issues on the basis of fleeting passions and in response to demagogues, you are likely to agree with
 - a. recall elections.
 - b. the New England town meeting.
 - c. the referendum.
 - d. participatory democracy.
 - e. many of the Framers of the Constitution.
15. The text suggests representative democracy is justified by all of the following concerns *except* that
 - a. the people have limited information and expertise.
 - b. direct democracy is impractical.
 - c. the people may decide large issues on the basis of fleeting passions.
 - d. the people cannot choose among competing leadership groups.
 - e. the people may respond to popular demagogues.
16. In sharp contrast to the United States, very few offices in some European democracies are
 - a. elective.
 - b. appointive.
 - c. full-time.
 - d. constitutional.
 - e. structured.
17. The text suggests the Founders thought the government should _____ popular views.
 - a. reflect
 - b. enlarge
 - c. minimize
 - d. mediate
 - e. be guided by
18. The Founders granted that representative democracy would
 - a. prevent factions from having any influence on government.
 - b. prevent sweeping changes in policy.
 - c. result in highly controversial elections.
 - d. often proceed slowly.
 - e. B and D.
19. The Founders might agree that _____ ought to hinge on popular vote.
 - a. the right to a fair trial
 - b. freedom of speech
 - c. freedom of press
 - d. freedom of religion
 - e. none of the above

20. Issues can be handled in a majoritarian fashion if
 - a. they are important enough to command the attention of most citizens.
 - b. they are sufficiently clear to elicit an informed opinion from citizens.
 - c. they are sufficiently feasible to address so that what citizens want can in fact be done.
 - d. all of the above.
 - e. none of the above.
21. In the Marxist view government is a reflection of underlying _____ forces.
 - a. economic
 - b. political
 - c. ideological
 - d. social
 - e. teleological
22. Marx concluded “modern” societies generally feature a clash of power between
 - a. farmers and industrialists.
 - b. capitalists and workers.
 - c. slaveowners and the landed aristocracy.
 - d. monarchists and anarchists.
 - e. intellectuals and spiritualists.
23. C. Wright Mills, an American sociologist, suggests politics and government are dominated by
 - a. the tyranny of the majority.
 - b. pork-barrel legislation.
 - c. a nocturnal council.
 - d. neo-Marxist policy.
 - e. the power elite.
24. Which of the following statements is *not* consistent with Mills’ position?
 - a. Corporate leaders are the primary, dominant nongovernmental influence in policy making.
 - b. Top military officials play an important role in the formulation of governmental policy.
 - c. The most important policies are made by a loose coalition of three groups.
 - d. A handful of key political leaders play an important role in the formulation of governmental policy.
 - e. Nongovernmental elites play an important role in the formulation of governmental policy.
25. Max Weber felt that the dominant social and political reality of modern times was that
 - a. “the Establishment” was dominated by Wall Street lawyers.
 - b. all institutions have fallen under the control of large bureaucracies.
 - c. capitalism is essential to modern-day forms of government.
 - d. conflict increased between the government and the press.
 - e. a dialectical process made communism inevitable.
26. Weber’s theory suggests it would be wise for scholars who want to study power to focus on
 - a. the President.
 - b. mid-term elections.
 - c. appointed officials and career government workers.
 - d. members of Congress.
 - e. critical national elections.

27. The view that money, expertise, prestige, and so forth are widely scattered throughout our society in the hands of a variety of groups is known as the

- pluralist view of American society.
- economic theory of democracy.
- elitist view of American society.
- dispersed power theory of American politics.
- monetary displacement theory of American politics.

28. A pluralist might agree with all of the following statements *except*

- political resources are not equally divided.
- mass opinion and the interests of citizens are irrelevant to policymaking.
- political resources are divided among different kinds of elites.
- elites are not a united front.
- policies are the outcome of complex patterns of haggling, compromises and shifting alliances.

29. The text suggests _____ theory “does the most to reassure one that America has been, and continues to be, a democracy in more than name.”

- Marxist
- bureaucratic
- pluralist
- power elite
- Weberian

30. Ronald Reagan’s policy initiatives on social and economic problems sought to

- return citizens’ assumptions to what they had been during World War II.
- make the government more efficient and capable of addressing social problems.
- broaden government’s social net for the truly needy.
- move the United States into the front rank of nations involved in forward social planning.
- return citizens’ assumptions to what they had been before the 1930s.

31. American foreign policy, according to the text, tends to alternate between

- cold wars and hot wars.
- idealism and realism.
- bipolarism and multilateralism.
- interventions and isolationism.
- realism and existentialism.

32. The fact that people have been willing to die over competing views of the public interest suggests that

- such views are more than mere window dressing.
- politics concerns who gets what, when, where, and how.
- delusions are central to the political process.
- human nature is fundamentally inconsistent.
- political issues are rarely understood.

33. The kinds of answers that political scientists usually give to the fundamental political questions tend to be

- highly abstract and speculative.
- clear, concrete, and consistent.
- partial, contingent, and controversial.
- qualified to the point of unintelligibility.
- empirical and void of theory.

34. According to the text, before making judgments about institutions and interests, we must first observe them
 - a. from a disinterested vantage point.
 - b. as manifestations of underlying economic relationships.
 - c. firsthand.
 - d. on a variety of different issues.
 - e. through the lenses of bureaucrats.
35. The logical place to begin the study of how power is distributed in U.S. politics is
 - a. the Constitutional Convention and events leading up to it.
 - b. your local town hall or courthouse.
 - c. the day-to-day lives of Americans.
 - d. the pages of this morning's newspaper.
 - e. the Civil War.

ESSAY QUESTIONS

Practice writing extended answers to the following questions. These test your ability to integrate and express the ideas that you have been studying in this chapter.

1. Explain the difference between power, authority and legitimacy. Explain how Americans think of the last concept in particular.
2. Explain two senses of the word "democracy" and note historical examples of each.
3. What are some of the requirements for representative democracy and what are some ways that representative democracies in Europe are different from America?
4. Explain the sense in which the Founding Fathers expected the "will of the people" and "majority opinion" would figure into the new government.
5. What are three conditions of majoritarian politics?
6. Identify and explain four schools of thought about the distribution of power in society. Along the way, note which view suggests the widest distribution of power, which view is popular with political scientists and which view has the most positive ramifications for America.

ANSWERS TO KEY TERMS MATCH QUESTIONS

1. u
2. t
3. b
4. m
5. v
6. s
7. j
8. f
9. n
10. a
11. o
12. p
13. l
14. x
15. g
16. e
17. q
18. r
19. c
20. w
21. d
22. h
23. i
24. k

ANSWERS TO TRUE/FALSE QUESTIONS

1. T
2. T
3. F In 1935, about 96 percent of all Americans paid no federal income tax whatsoever. Today almost all families pay about 21 percent of their incomes.
4. T
5. T
6. F Sometimes is exercised in subtle ways that may not even be evident to those who are exercising it.

7. F Increasingly matters once thought to be “private” are becoming “public.”

8. T

9. T

10. F Hamilton worried just the opposite, that it would be too democratic.

11. T

12. F Slaves, women, minors and those without property were excluded from participation.

13. T

14. T

15. F The text uses Joseph Schumpeter’s definition of representative democracy, not direct democracy.

16. T

17. T

18. F They did not. In their view, a government that could act swiftly and in radical ways could also do a great deal of harm.

19. F They do have higher levels of access to news and information, but they are not giving political news and information more attention than in the past. Most, especially young people, do not consume political news.

20. T

21. T

22. F Mills “power elite” consisted of corporate leaders, key military officials and key politicians.

23. T

24. T

25. F Weber saw power in the fact that bureaucrats also have discretion, which can cause their implementation of policies to vary widely.

26. F Pluralists do not believe everyone has power or that everyone has the same amount. They recognize that there are political elites (those with a disproportionate amount of political power and influence).

27. F The pluralist view is the more reassuring on this count.

28. T

29. T

30. T

31. T

32. T

ANSWERS TO MULTIPLE CHOICE QUESTIONS

1. b
2. c

- 3. a
- 4. b
- 5. e
- 6. a
- 7. e
- 8. b
- 9. c
- 10. e
- 11. e
- 12. a
- 13. b
- 14. e
- 15. d
- 16. a
- 17. d
- 18. e
- 19. e
- 20. d
- 21. a
- 22. b
- 23. e
- 24. a
- 25. b
- 26. c
- 27. a
- 28. b
- 29. c
- 30. e
- 31. d
- 32. a
- 33. c
- 34. d
- 35. a